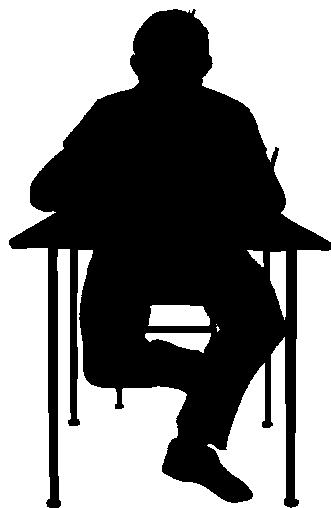




General Guidelines for Teachers



- Greet each child warmly each day.
- Spend time with each child every day.
- Value each child.
- Eliminate stressful situations from your classroom and routines.
- In a calm and supportive manner, discuss honestly the facts about the disaster. Falsely minimizing the disaster will not end a child's concern.
- Encourage children to share their feelings and discuss their experiences.

Methods for Helping Children Cope with Disaster

- Story-telling. Oral or written story-telling can help children reenact their experiences in a constructive manner. Encouraging group discussion after each child relates his/her story allows the children to assist each other.
- Art projects. Encouraging children to draw what they have felt, wished or dreamed after a disaster allows them to express their feelings. Like story-telling, the drawings can be shared during a period of group discussion. Non-verbal activities promote the sharing of feelings and the beginning of grieving.
- Group Projects. In a discussion led by a teacher, children can discuss how they can assist with recovery efforts. Examples of projects might be gathering toys and books for the relief effort or working together on a clean-up project. This might be especially helpful in schools that have been seriously affected by the disaster.

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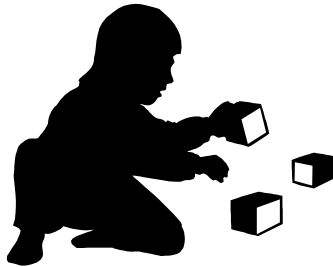
Adapted by UF/IFAS from:
*Stress and Coping With
Disaster: A Handbook
Compiled Following the
Midwest Flood of 1993 for
Extension Professionals*,
compiled by Marty Baker
and Ami O'Neill

Classroom Activities

Many teachers respond to disasters with creative classroom activities to assist their students in discussing their experiences and putting them into perspective. Some of these activities are appropriate for various age groups. They are meant to be vehicles for expression and discussion for your students and can be important steps in the healing process. These are examples of what can be done. They can be used to stimulate your own ideas and can

be adapted to meet your students' needs and tailored to fit with your teaching style.

Preschool Activities



“Availability of toys that encourage reenactment of children’s experiences and observations during the disaster can help integrate their experiences.”

- Availability of toys that encourage play reenactment of children's experiences and observations during the disaster can help children integrate their experiences. These might include fire trucks, dump trucks, rescue trucks, ambulances, building blocks, or playing with puppets or dolls as ways for the child to act out his or her own feelings about what has happened.
- Children need close physical contact during times of stress to help them reestablish ego boundaries and a sense of security. Games that involve physical touching among children within a structure are helpful in this regard. Some example might be: Ring Around a Rosie, London Bridge and Duck, Duck, Goose.
- Providing extra amounts of finger foods in small portions and fluids is a concrete way of supplying the emotional and physical nourishment children need in times of stress. Oral satisfaction is especially necessary as children tend to revert to more regressive behavior when they feel that their survival or security is threatened.
- Have the children make a mural on long paper with topics such as what happened in your house (school, neighborhood), when the big storm hit. This is recommended for small groups with discussion afterward facilitated by an adult.
- "Short stories" by individual children, dictated to an adult on a one-to-one basis on topics like, "what I do and don't like about the rain." This activity can help the child verbalize his/her fears, as well as to perhaps get back in touch with previous positive associations with the disruptive phenomena.
- Read books about the disaster and discuss them.
- Have the children draw pictures about the disaster and then discuss the pictures in small groups. This allows them to vent their experiences and to discover that others share their fears.

Elementary School Age Activities

- For the younger children, availability of toys that encourage play reenactment of children's experiences and observations during the disaster can help children integrate these experiences. These might include fire trucks, dump trucks, rescue trucks, ambulances, building blocks, or playing with puppets or dolls



“Encourage class activities in which children can organize or build projects. This can help them gain a sense of mastery or control over events.”

- as ways for the child to act out his or her own feelings about what has happened.
- Encourage the children to develop skits or puppet shows about what happened in the disaster. Encourage them to include positive experiences, as well as those aspects that were frightening or disconcerting.
- Stimulate group discussion about disaster experiences by showing your own feelings, fears or experiences during the flood. It is very important to legitimize their feelings and to help them feel less isolated.
- Have the children brainstorm their own classroom or family disaster plan. What would they do? What would they take if they had to evacuate? How would they contact their parents? How should the family be prepared? How could they help their family? Encourage them to discuss these things with their families.
- Encourage class activities in which children can organize or build projects (scrapbooks, replicas, etc.). This can help them gain a sense of mastery or control over events.
- Have the children color pictures in a coloring book that are related to a disaster. Encourage children to talk about their own feelings.

Junior High and High School Activities

- Group discussion of their experiences during a disaster is especially important for adolescents. They need the opportunity to vent as well as to normalize the extreme emotions that might come up after a disaster. They may need considerable reassurance that even extreme emotions and "crazy thoughts" are normal in a disaster. A good way to stimulate discussion is for a teacher to share his/her own reactions to the disaster. It is important to end such discussions on a positive note, for example, What heroic acts were observed? How can we be of help at home or in the community? How could we be more prepared for a disaster? Such discussion is appropriate for any course of study in that it can facilitate a return to more normal functioning.
- Break the class into small groups and have them develop a disaster plan for their home, school or community. This can be helpful in repairing a sense of mastery and security, as well as having practical merit. The small groups can share their plans with the class. Encourage students to share their plans with their families. They may wish to conduct a "Family Disaster

Preparedness" meeting and invite family members to participate.

- Conduct a class discussion and/or support a class project on how the students might help the community rehabilitation effort. It is important to help them develop concrete and realistic ways to be of assistance. This helps them to overcome feelings of helplessness, frustration, and "survivor guilt" that are common in disaster situations.
- Classroom activities that relate the disaster to a course of study can be a good way to help the students integrate their own experiences and observations while providing specific learning experiences. In implementing the following suggestions, or similar ideas of your own, it is very important to allow time for the students to discuss feelings that are stimulated by the projects or issues covered.

Art—Have the students portray their experiences in disaster in various art media. This may be done individually or as a group effort (for example, making a mural).

Civics/Government—Study government agencies responsible for aid to victims, how they work, how effective they are, the political implications of disaster within a community. Examine the community systems and how the stress of disaster has affected them. Have students invite a local government official to class to discuss disaster precautions, warning systems, etc. Visit local emergency operating centers and learn about their functions.

English Composition—Have the students write about their own experiences in the disaster. Issues like the problem of conveying heavy emotional tone without being overly dramatic might be discussed.

Health—Discuss emotional reactions to disaster, the importance of taking care of one's own emotional and physical well-being, etc. Discuss health implications of the disaster, for example, water contamination, food that may have spoiled due to lack of refrigeration, and other health precautions and safety measures. Discuss the effects of adrenalin on the body during stress and danger. A guest speaker from public health and/or mental health might be invited to the class.



“Science classes can cover specific aspects of the disaster.”

History—Have students report on natural disasters that have occurred in your community or geographic area and what lessons can be useful in preparing for future disasters.

Journalism—Have students write stories that cover different aspects of the disaster. These might include: community impact, lawsuits that result from a disaster, human interest stories from fellow students, environmental impact, etc. Issues such as accurate reporting of catastrophic events and sensationalism might be discussed. The stories might be compiled into a special publication. Invite a reporter or editor from a local newspaper, radio or television station to describe to the class how they handle news coverage of a disaster.

Literature—Have students report on natural disaster in Greek mythology, American and British literature, and poetry.

Math—Have the class solve mathematical problems related to the impact of the disaster, for example, build questions around how many gallons of water lost, cubic feet of earth/sand moved, etc.

Peer Counseling—Provide special information on common responses to disaster. Encourage the students to help each other integrate their own experiences.

Psychology—Have the students apply what they learned in the course to the emotions, behaviors and stress reactions they felt or observed in the disaster. Discuss post-traumatic stress disorder. Have a guest speaker from the mental health professions involved in disaster work with victims. Have students discuss (from their own experience) what things have been most helpful in dealing with disaster-related stress. Have students develop a mental health education brochure discussing emotional/behavioral reactions to disaster and things that are helpful in coping with disaster-related stress. Have students conduct a survey among their parents or friends. What was the most dangerous situation in which you ever found yourself? How did you react psychologically?

Science—Cover specific aspects of the disaster, for example, discuss climate condition, geological impact, etc. You could discuss physiological responses to stress and methods of dealing with it. Discuss how some animals band together in a

threatening or emergency situation. What can be learned from their instinctive actions?

Speech/Drama—Have students portray catastrophic emotions that arise in response to a disaster. Have them develop a skit or play on some aspects of the event. Conduct a debate about a disaster-related issue, for example, are women are more psychologically prepared to handle stress than men (or vice-versa).